

Teaching Ideas

What Your are Going For

- Awareness of details
- Ability to see what others miss
- Knowing what's most important or interesting
- A good sense of the "main point" or "main storyline"

Suggested Activities

1. Be Observers

Ask students to be observers of their surroundings. See how much they notice. Record their observations. You can do this on a nature hike, for instance, or by observing a classroom pet, such as a chameleon, hamster, rabbit, or fish. Don't stop too soon, either. Make them dig a little. Keep them working on it till they really cannot come up with more. Then say, 'OK, of all the things we noticed, which are most interesting? Most important? Most unusual? Which details would you like to read about?'

2. Use Pictures

To draw out summary lists of details. Greeting cards and postcards are good sources for unusual, colorful, and interesting pictures. Collect them. If students are old enough to write their own lists, let them work in groups- A more advanced version of this is to have students describe a picture, then see if others can recognize it from the description.

Teaching Organization

What You're Going For

- Sense of sequence
- Ability to organize & group
- Sense of beginning
- Sense of ending

Suggested Activities

1. Was This a Good Lead?

When you read stories (or other literature or writings) aloud, pause after the beginning to ask, "Why do you think the writer started this way?" Alternative: BEFORE beginning, ask, "Where do you think the writer will begin?"

2. Predict!

As you are reading, ask, "What do you think will happen next? What will this writer talk about next? How do you think it might end?"

Teaching Voice

What You're Going For

- Feelings
- Enthusiasm for writing
- Individuality
- Passion

Suggested Activities

1. Read! Read! Read!

Read and discuss lots of literature with voice. Look everywhere. Picture books are great (see Picture Books: An Annotated Bibliography described in the chapter on "Using Reading to Teach Writing," for more ideas); but they're not the only source. Also check the paper, and magazines (especially ads, movie reviews, book reviews, and editorials). Check food labels, brochures, junk mail, etc. Go for the strong and the weak, always asking, "Did you like this writing? Would you like to hear more? Why? Why not?" Join in these discussions yourself. Let it be known that you value and seek voice in writing. If you run across something you love in your own reading, bring it in to share-even if it's difficult. Your love of good language and feeling is more important to convey than the meaning of the text.

2. Look For Individuality

In both pictures and print. Point it out. Praise students for their differences: "This is so unusual, so unlike anyone else's!"

Teaching Word Choice

What You're Going For

- Awareness of language
- Awareness that there are different ways to say things
- Love of favorite words

Suggested Activities

1. Collect Favorite Words

Make lists. Decorate them on colored paper and post them or hang them from the ceilings. Make mobiles. Make word collages. Encourage labeling - but be creative. Put adjectives with the nouns: e.g., not just "wall," but "drab green wall" perhaps.

2. Retire Tired Words

Put the words you're tired of in a shoe box and bury them.

Teaching Sentence Fluency

What You're Going For

- An ear for language
- A love of rhythm
- Sentence sense

Suggested Activities

1. Share Rhythmic Language

That's fun to read aloud. Poetry is an excellent choice, but be sure the rhymes are creative and the language natural. Some poems work so hard at rhyming that much of the natural flow is lost. Rehearse. Read it aloud before you share it with students, so it will feel natural. Remember that some prose pieces have wonderful rhythm, too. Hearing good language read aloud builds fluency even in young writers who are themselves not yet ready to begin writing sentences.

2. Share Two Versions

Of writing with the same content but a very different sound. Write one with short, choppy sentences: We went to the beach. It was sunny. It was warm. We had fun. We flew kites. We ate snacks. VERSUS: We spent a warm, sunny day at the beach eating snacks and flying kites. Ask students which they prefer and why. You may need to share a number of examples before students begin to hear the differences. Don't give up. Keep sharing. Keep asking.

Teaching Conventions

What You're Going For

- Awareness of writing conventions
- Willingness to experiment
- Patience to take a second look

Suggested Activities

1. Begin Simply

Assign editing tasks that are appropriate for age and ability. A good first editing activity is to check for your name on your paper. Is it there? Be sure you refer to this as editing, and reward students for having the patience to go back and check for this detail. Gradually, add other simple things as appropriate: e.g., a title on the paper or picture, a date on the piece. Eventually, beginning writers can also add such things as space between words, vertical space between lines, left to right orientation on the page, etc.

2. Encourage Young Writers to Think Like Editors

As students begin to generate their own conventional text (multiple words, beginning sentences, punctuated phrases and sentences), routinely and frequently ask WHY: Why did you put a period here? Why did you put a capital letter here? This helps reinforce the thinking behind the conventions.

